

Message Text

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43

ACTION NEA-13

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INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

USMISSION GENEVA

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY SANAA

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

C O N F I D E N T I A L CAIRO 325

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR EG SY IS

SUBJECT: EGYPTIAN CONCERN FOR SYRIAN SETTLEMENT INTERESTS

BEIRUT PASS DAMASCUS AND BAGHDAD

GENEVA FOR MEPC DEL

1. IN WAKE OF EGYPTIAN/ISRAELI AGREEMENT ON DISENGAGEMENT,
ONE ASPECT OF SADAT'S FOREIGN POLICY WHICH IS BEING GIVEN
CONSIDERABLE EMPHASIS IS EGYPTIAN SOLIDARITY WITH SYRIA.

2. SADAT HIMSELF STRUCK KEYNOTE DURING MEETING WITH EGYPTIAN
PRESS IN ASWAN ON JANUARY 18. AT THAT TIME, HE WAS QUOTED
AS SAYING, "I WANT TO AFFIRM THE COMMITMENT ON MY SIDE TO
DISENGAGEMENT ON THE SYRIAN FRONT BECAUSE IT IS ONE WITH
THE EGYPTIAN FRONT..." SUBSEQUENTLY, EGYPTIAN OFFICIALS
(HAFEZ GHANEM FOR EXAMPLE, AT MEETING OF ASU SECRETARIAT
ON JANUARY 19) AND CAIRO PRESS BEGAN TO TAKE UP THEME OF
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EGYPTIAN ADHERENCE TO SYRIA AND PARTICULARLY TO SYRIAN/

ISRAELI DISENGAGEMENT, POINTING UP CONTINUOUS CONTACT BETWEEN SADAT AND AL-ASAD ON SUBJECT. ON JANUARY 20, SADAT REFERRED TO SYRIAN WHILE SPEAKING TO CORRESPONDENTS IN BAHREIN: "SYRIA IS LINKED TO EGYPT IN A FEDERATION. EGYPT AND SYRIA ARE ONE FRONT, UNDER ONE COMMAND...ANY THREAT TO SYRIA WILL BE CONSIDERED A THREAT TO EGYPT."

3. ON JANUARY 21 AKHBAR'S MUSA SABRI, WHOSE PERSONAL AMBITION HAS MADE HIM A USEFUL WEATHERVANE OF VIEWS OF THE POLITICAL ESTABLISHMENT, STATED THAT SYRIA GAVE SADAT A MANDATE TO ACT ON HER BEHALF IN ACHIEVING A SEPARATION OF FORCES ON SYRIAN FRONT DURING FINAL DAYS OF SECRETARY KISSINGER'S VISIT TO MIDDLE EAST. ACCORDING TO SABRI, SADAT, WHO RELATED THE STORY TO EGYPTIAN JOURNALISTS, RECEIVING TELEGRAM FROM AL-ASAD ON THE EVENING OF JAN 16 OFFICIAL DELEGATING HIM TO SPEAK WITH THE SECRETARY ABOUT SYRIAN/ISRAELI DISENGAGEMENT. THIS MANDATE, HOWEVER, CAME TOO LATE, AND SADAT EXPLAINED THAT IT WAS NOT POSSIBLE TO POSTPONE THE EGYPTIAN/ISRAELI AGREEMENT UNTIL A SYRIAN/ISRAELI AGREEMENT WAS FINALIZED. NEVERTHELESS, SADAT SAID EGYPT WOULD NOT FAIL AL-ASAD, "TO WHOM WE OWE A NATIONAL DEBT".

COMMENT: WHETHER OR NOT SABRI'S ACCOUNT IS APOCRYPHAL, SADAT'S PURSUIT OF SYRIAN SETTLEMENT INTERESTS --DISENGAGEMENT IN PARTICULAR--HAS FOR THE MOMENT, BECOME EGYPTIAN POLICY DOCTRINE. IT IS REASONABLE TO EXPECT THAT THIS DIRECT AND OVERT CONCERN FOR SARG OBJECTIVES WILL CONTINUE AS LONG AS A. AL-ASAD SHOWS SOME SIGN OF WILLINGNESS TO DISCUSS SETTLEMENT ISSUES--OR UNTIL SADAT BELIEVES HE CAN NO LONGER BE INDUCED TO DO SO AND B. AS LONG AS SURGE OF CRITICISM OF EGYPT BY OTHER ARABS (IRAQIS, LIBYANS AND PFLP) POSES THREAT OF ISOLATING SADAT AS HE PURSUES HIS OWN SETTLEMENT AIMS. WITHIN THIS CONTEXT, SADAT'S SYRIAN POLICY IS ESSENTIALLY A DEFENSIVE ONE, DESIGNED AS MUCH TO PROTECT HIS OWN FLANKS AS TO PERFORM AN ACT OF CHARITY TO AL-ASAD. AT THE SAME TIME, IT IS FULLY CONSISTENT WITH EGYPTIAN DETERMINATION TO RETAIN POLITICAL INITIATIVE IN THE ARAB WORLD.
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